WHIRRAKEE

March 2004 Vol. 25 No. 2

Registered by Australia Post. Publication No. VBH4462

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2003 - 2004

President	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Senior Vice President	Stuart Fraser	12 Bambara Close, Bendigo	
Junior Vice President	vacant		
Secretary	Bill Holsworth	13 Nabilla Crs, Bendigo e-mail:wholsworth@bigpond.com	5443 4063
Minute Secretary	Jane Cleary	24 Goynes Road, Epsom	5448 4396
Treasurer	Stuart Fraser		
Membership Officer	Kate Lottkowitz	80 Piccaninny Rd, RSD Strathfieldsaye	5439 3157
Excursion organiser	vacant		
Syllabus organiser	Rod Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
Librarian	Diana Collier	31 Milroy Street, Bendigo	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis		0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens	82 Somerville Street, Bendigo e-mail: s.wilkens@bendigo.latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Rob Moors (ex officio), Lyn Hamilton, Maurie Lewis, Glenise Moors, Bob Ruddick, and there are 4 vacancies.

Excursions Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front Cover: The photograph, from Clive Fisher, shows *Lomandra multiflora*, Many-flowered Mat-rush. This species flowered prolifically last year. They are normally quite hard to spot due to the small, slightly drab flowers that are low on the plant. However, close-up they are very beautiful.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 25, No.2, March 2004

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Next General Meeting		3
BFNC Garden News	Matthew Comer	3
Workshops in 2004		3
Adult and pupae of the Imperial White Butterfly (*Delias harpalyce*)	Rod Orr	4
Whirrakee Print Post Bulk Mailing	Rod Orr	5
Australian Naturalists Network Get Together 2004 - Preliminary notice	Eddie and Joy Dell	5
Greater Bendigo National Park from the Air	Rod Orr	6
Greater Bendigo National Park - your input required		7
Field Day 'Growing Native Grasses'	Native Seeds Pty Ltd	7
From the Mailbag	Elaine Mathison	8
Photographic Competition	NCCMA	9
Significant Bird Event	Jim Downey	9

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note
I want to thank Rod Orr for contributing the major part of this edition of Whirrakee. Rod wears many hats and one important one is being a member of the Community Consultation Group for the management of Bendigo's new National Park. The Club has worked so hard at getting this park, it is now important that we have input over the next few months while the draft management plan is being drawn up (see page 7).

General BFNC Meeting
Wednesday, March 10 at 7.30pm.

Carol Hall will talk about
'Natural History of Antarctica & Patagonia'

see Carol's biographical detail below.

These biographical details were provided by Carol Hall:

"After graduating in Geography from the University of Sheffield and teaching for two years, I arrived in NSW in 1972 and taught Field Studies to visiting senior High School students at the then Jindabyne National Fitness Centre (now transformed, I see, into the Jindabyne Winter Sports Academy!)

I taught Geography for 14 years at Ballarat Grammar School. Photography, travel and outdoor pursuits were integral to such work, and after my husband died in 1993 I joined the Ballarat Field Naturalists, and later both Ballarat camera clubs and the Victorian Nature Photography Group.

With a particular interest in Ice Ages and the processes of glaciation, I visited Alaska in 1997. Then in February of 2000 I fulfilled the long-held dream of visiting Antarctica, plus a few days walking in Patagonia."

BFNC Garden News

by Matthew Comer

Earlier this summer, the garden was out of control with masses of prickly lettuce an other weeds taking over. It seemed a bit overwhelming and we wondered how we would ever beat them. However, the efforts of a number of committed volunteers both at working bees and also in their own time saw the garden re-claimed.
Many thanks to all these people!
The dry summer conditions have meant that few weeds have re-appeared so the garden is once again looking good. Most of the existing plants and the plants added last winter are surviving well, with several species flowering. Members who attended the February meeting were shown some of these plants during a short tour of the garden (see list below).
This year, to try and keep ahead of the weeds and also to spread the workload out rather than exhaust ourselves at big working bees, we will try holding more regular smaller working bees.

The first will be on this Saturday, March 6th at 9am. I will mainly involve a general tidy up and removal of dead branches, grass etc., followed by morning tea.
There will then be a working bee each month on the Saturday before the general meeting, also at 9am, so the following one will be on **Saturday 10th April** and so on.
Please check the *Whirrakee* in case there is any change. We are always looking for new helpers in the garden, so hope to see you there.

Below is a list of those plants that were flowering in February or were about to flower:

Myoporum parvifolium	Creeping Boobialla (one local form and one other)
Enchylaena tomentosa (in fruit)	Ruby Salt Bush
Bracteantha viscosa	Sticky Everlasting
Chrysocephalum semipapposum	Clustered Everlasting
Pelargonium rodneyanum	Magenta Storksbill
Pelargonium australe	Austral Storksbill
Dianella longifolia	Smooth Flax Lily
Olearia decurrens	Daisy Bush
Cassinia uncata	Sticky Cassinia
Cassinia arcuata	Drooping Cassinia (in bud)
Calocephalus citreus	Lemon Beauty Heads
Eucalyptus polybractea	Blue Mallee (in bud)
Eucalyptus viridis	Green Mallee (in bud)
Eucalyptus froggattii	Kamarooka Mallee
Eucalyptus polyanthemus	Red Box (in bud)
Minuria sp.	Daisy
Linum marginale	Native Flax

Wanted – Inspiration and Presenters for Workshops

The Club is planning to run four to five workshops prior to the general meetings this year. If you have any idea(s) for a workshop, and better still, if you are prepared to run one, please let a committee member know.

Adult and pupae of the Imperial White Butterfly (*Delias harpalyce*)

by Rod Orr

Author's comments:
The Committee of SEANA (the South East Australian Naturalists Association) are trying to interest member clubs in contributing to a Calendar. Dick Southcombe asked me if I could suggest something suitable and, in the short time available, I chose the following description and explanation of an aspect of local Natural History, emphasising interactions between organisms.

The larvae of the Imperial White Butterfly hatch from eggs laid on the leaves of the Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*). They eat the mistletoe leaves and pupate on a communal web which they spin on what is left of the clump of mistletoe. The adult butterflies emerge on a hot day during late Spring or early Summer.

The Box Mistletoe is a commonly occurring native plant which grows as an aerial parasite, extracting liquids through its attachment to its host. Its usual host plants are several of the Box and Ironbark eucalypts of the forests of central Victoria. These trees grow in the clay soils derived from the erosion of Ordovician mudstones and sandstones and are well adapted to the climate of this part of the state.

This is an interesting example of a complex interaction between a beautiful butterfly and its food plant, between a parasitic mistletoe and its hosts, and between the Box-Ironbark eucalypts of central Victoria and their biophysical environment which provides all of the essentials for their survival.

The method of dispersal of the Box Mistletoe adds yet another dimension to this chain of relationships. It involves the Mistletoe Bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*), a beautiful, tiny native bird which feeds on the mistletoe's fruit and spreads its seeds to other potential eucalypt hosts.

This chain of connections is delicately balanced - not every mistletoe plant is completely eaten by butterfly larvae, not every eucalypt is infested with Box Mistletoe, there seem to be enough mistletoes with fruit for the Mistletoe Birds to eat, and not every mistletoe seed germinates on a suitable host.

The host trees, their mistletoe parasites, the insect larvae which feed on their leaves, and the spread of mistletoes by Mistletoe Birds, are all relationships which have evolved over a very long time. These organisms are all very well adapted to each other.

Perhaps the last link in this chain of relationships is between mistletoes and us. Australians show a general lack of knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the ecological place and importance of mistletoes. Mistletoes are blamed, unfairly, for the occasional death of a host tree, instead of recognising that many factors cause tree decline and death.

By far the most important influences are deliberate or unintended damage to tree trunks and branches and, most importantly, to the roots of eucalypts resulting from human activities. Most of this damage, which causes tree decline and eventually death, results from earthworks carried out much too close to the trunk, within the drip-line of the tree's canopy. This zone should always be protected from soil disturbance to avoid damaging the roots and causing an irreversible decline in tree health.

Australians and mistletoes are not yet very well adapted to each other. Considerable time might be required before a better relationship evolves!

I was interested to see that Dick has shortened this by leaving out the last 3 paragraphs - the 'political' statement! However, I think that life is too short to pass up an opportunity to say something a bit more pointed about the understanding and attitudes of the general public when the word 'mistletoe' is mentioned - what do you think?

Photographic Competition

'Snapshot of a Region'

Victoria's North Central region is rich in natural assets of regional, national and international significance. The North Central Catchment Management Authority would like to capture the essence of our unique environment through the camera lenses of our community...

...for more detail see page 10.

Whirrakee Print Post Bulk Mailing

Author: Rod Orr

Now that we are folding *Whirrakee* just once down the middle, it is classified as a 'Large' article even though, usually, each single copy of *Whirrakee* weighs only 35 - 40 grams.

This method of folding also means that we need to sort the magazines into only the following Postcodes, which has simplified things greatly:

Local Office of Delivery

Magazines addressed to the following Postcodes are counted together but bundled separately to reduce postage:

3550, 3552, 3554, 3555, 3556

Same State

Magazines addressed to all other Victorian Postcodes are bundled together in lots of 20 for counting. It is **not** necessary to sort them into their separate Postcodes, thank goodness!

Other States

The small number of magazines sent to 'Other States' get bundled together.

We've found that it's worthwhile spending a few minutes sorting out the 'special' Postcodes which need to be bundled up separately - this saves considerable time in the long run.

In a typical monthly mail-out, we fold and address 120 magazines - we also deliver a few magazines direct and unfolded (mostly to BFNC members within La Trobe University).

We deliver the folded, addressed, sorted, and counted magazines to the Bendigo Mail Centre no earlier than mid-morning the next day (well clear of any 'Rush Hour' problems). The staff there are always pleased to see us and are very keen to help us minimise total postage costs.

Normally the Bulk Mail Postage costs us about $55 monthly.

We meet to perform this pleasant task at 4:30 to 5 pm on the first Wednesday of each month (in the BFNC Club-rooms). Often those who arrive early also get involved with a minor amount of rubbish removal, weed control, or a brief inspection of our indigenous garden.

Anyone who wants to participate is always very welcome to come along and join in.

Australian Naturalists Network Get Together 2004 - Preliminary notice

by Eddie and Joy Dell
ANN Get-together Co-Ordinators 2004
Phone: 08 92951215
e-mail: dellej@westnet.com.au

The third get-together as foreshadowed in Alice Springs in 2000 and confirmed in Tasmania at the hand-over in 2002 will be hosted by the Western Australian Naturalists' Club in the spring of 2004. Unfortunately it has not been possible to provide information earlier due to several factors including site inspection of diverse locations within economic distances of the core program venue. You should appreciate that western Australia being such a vast state with ever changing and variable climate conditions it is difficult to predict so far in advance what will be occurring in various diverse regions. It had been intended that the pre-tour embrace the everlasting fields to the north but this has proved to be impossible, logistically and weather wise, considering that the core program should take advantage of the usually better later spring conditions in the south west vegetation province that stretches from near Geraldton to the north to Albany in the south.

The get-together dates are:

- **Pre-tour - Wednesday 22 September to Saturday 25 September**
- **Core program - Saturday 25 September to Monday 4 October, with a rest day on 29 September and the last day on 4 October being a fairly informal event.**
- **Post tour - Tuesday 5 October to Friday 8 October.**

The venue including accommodation for the core program is the Perth international Big 4 Tourist Park, Hale Road Forrestfield 6058.

Arrangements have been made with management for use of the excellent facilities for evening talks etc, but you will need to make your own accommodation arrangements direct with the tourist park.

An early indication of proposed attendance, indicating which of the three events members intend to take part in would assist greatly with all of our planning arrangements.

May all you from across the continent get into the spirit of **"Perth here we come in 2004"**

Greater Bendigo National Park from the Air

by Rod Orr

This is just a brief report of a recent Parks Victoria flight over the Greater Bendigo National & Regional Park - there was a spare seat which I was offered, and accepted.

Before we took off, we were able to talk about the importance of the Wellsford Forest (while we were waiting for the plane to return from the Rushworth trip). We also talked a bit about what passes for 'productive forestry' in our Box-Ironbark State Forests (production of fence-posts & firewood which are both demonstrably uneconomic & environmentally damaging) & about the so-called 'scientific thinning trials'.

You see a large amount of degraded land from the air, particularly gravel-scraped areas, quarries, mine sites & eucalyptus harvesting areas. The Bendigo Mining Decline Portal and its surrounding Bund Wall and mullock dumps also stand out very clearly as a major blot on the forested landscape in the Golden Square area. There is a current application to increase this area of degradation by about 300%, which will require the clearing of a large area of forest in the newly established park which surrounds the mine, simply to provide cleared land for mullock dumping. If permitted, this would be a very low-grade use for this part of Bendigo's new Box-Ironbark Park.

The extent of the Hazledene poultry sheds in the Lockwood area surprised me. Large areas of forested land must have been cleared to establish this intensive industry, which is still surrounded by forested land. The forest is being used as a screen and a buffer for these very large sheds, rather than the forest itself being protected by a buffer zone from the impacts of intensive animal agriculture. The Big Hill Range & the Reference Area show clearly as the southern boundary of this part of the National Park. The Metamorphic Aureole deserves protection in its own right as a significant & distinctive landscape feature.

The Woodvale evaporation ponds stand out very clearly, and also the New Moon slurry dump area North-west of Eaglehawk, in the Eaglehawk Regional Park - both are part of Bendigo Mining's operations at Golden Square.

The eucalyptus harvesting areas of the Whipstick and Kamarooka are severely degraded when seen from the air. From the ground, the regenerating mallees and other shrubby vegetation attracts your attention but, when seen from the air, there is no escaping the vast denuded areas where Blue and Green Mallee has been cut. Large areas of almost completely bare soil are the most obvious landscape features of these parts of the park which are leased for eucalyptus harvesting. All of this environmental degradation is the cost to the community of eucalyptus harvesting from public land, which benefits only 2 leaseholders in an 'industry' which can not compete with eucalyptus oil imported at half the cost of local production.

Black Rock could be seen very clearly, in the north-west corner of the Whipstick - no sign of the feral goat population was seen during several circuits of the rock. The outer edges of the forested land surrounding Bendigo are quite sharply defined. Bendigo may well be described as a 'City in a Park' but the surrounding ring of forested land is very limited in extent. It is very clear that the Greater Bendigo National Park and Regional Park together comprise only a very small island of forested land surrounded by a landscape which is almost completely cleared of trees except for strips of narrow roadside vegetation and small, isolated, scattered patches of forested land.

The thin forested connection between the Whipstick and the Kamarooka is particularly obvious from the air, and also the abrupt end of the northern extreme of the Kamarooka shows a dramatic contrast with the landscape further North, which is virtually a treeless alluvial plain. The differing forest types could be clearly distinguished from the air. The tall, open, Grey Box forests of the Kamarooka appear very different from the mallee areas of the Whipstick and the Ironbark dominated areas of the Wellsford Forest. Areas of Blue and Green Mallee could also be distinguished very easily.

Returning to the Airstrip provided a clear view of the Wellsford Forest and showed how virtually all of the larger gullies, with the most fertile soils, had been cleared for agriculture and now appeared as deep incursions into the forested land. The Wellsford Forest shows up as the largest block of forested land in this region. It is

a great pity that only about one fifth of its area is now protected as Regional Park while the remainder of this very important forest is still subjected to the same forestry management that has led to its present degraded state. Virtually all of the Wellsford has been 'managed' as a firewood forest - the trees were all cut to encourage regrowth by coppicing, and, later, the coppice growth was cut as convenient sized firewood. Some areas were managed more for posts and poles so the trees there were allowed to grow single stemmed and to a larger size before harvesting. There are only about 8 or 9 large, old trees now surviving in this forest, everything else has been cut down several times over. Most of the Wellsford has also been degraded by frequent burning which was prescribed to protect the wood values of the forest but the cost has been the degradation of its broader ecological values. Shrub cover is absent in much of this forest and most of this very large tract of forested land is a 'bird desert' indicating clearly its degraded nature as habitat for fauna.

This aerial tour also showed clearly how intensive the subdivision development has been in many parts of urban Bendigo which have the Park as their boundary. Urban development on the forest fringe of Bendigo will have increasingly negative impacts on the natural values of our Box-Ironbark Parks unless these problems are recognised and avoided or minimised.

Although flying over the new Box-Ironbark Park is an interesting way to obtain a different perspective, it is no substitute for driving to various locations in the Park and walking amongst the vegetation. The Advisory Group for the Greater Bendigo Box-Ironbark National Park should do this so that its members are all able to gain a more detailed appreciation and understanding of some of the important features, values and management issues of the Greater Bendigo National Park. Brief explanations from local experts who are familiar with the flora, fauna & other values would add further value to this experience.

Greater Bendigo National Park - Your Input Required

Parks Victoria requires input between now and May for the Draft Management Plan for the National Park. The plan will the be open to the public and submissions will be invited for the next two months.
Rod Orr is on the Community Consultation group for this so any comments as to the future management of the Park can go to him, however, input can also made directly to Ros Woodburn (ph 54304631, e-mail: rwoodburn@parks.vic.gov.au) or Chris McCormack (ph. 54304645, e-mail: cmccorma@parks.vic.gov.au) at Parks Victoria.

Members were told at the February meeting of the BFNC that at One Tree Hill, for example dog walking will be allowed (dogs on leash). There will also be limited gold digging permitted in the Park and licenced recreational vehicles and bikes will be able to go on formed paths.

Although no separate management plans are planned for our Regional and State Parks, it is hoped that any National Park management plan will also be able to be used for these other reserves.

Native Seeds First Field Day

Growing native grasses

Tuesday 30 March 2004
10am – 2pm

Native Seeds Nursery
537 Mitiamo-Echuca Road, Echuca

refreshments and lunch available for purchase
RSVP by 19 March:
enquiries@nativeseeds.com.au

see back page for more detail...

From the Mailbag
Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

* * * * * * *

THE VICTORIAN NATURALIST(VFNC)
December 2003

Articles in this issue cover a range of topics from the symposium entitled "A Review of the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act..." held in September last year.

- Has the FFG Act Achieved What We Hoped?
- The Victorian FFG Act - a Toothless Tiger Quoll?
- Implementation of the Threatened Species Conservation Act In NSW.

* * * * * * *

THE BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
February 2004

- Birds at Lake Moondarra, Mt Isa, Queensland: some surprises during a three-month stay
- The Australian Ringneck: a general survey including history of naming and distribution of races
- Birds of Victoria's Northwest: exploring Victoria's desert parks
- Birding in Florida, USA: more birds than expected in a "flat and boring landscape"

* * * * * * *

AUSTRALIAN LANDCARE
December 2003

- Riparian Fencing: the benefits of fencing along rivers and around waterholes
- Wetlands: finding the balance between conservation and cattle grazing
- Wetlands Environmental Flows: managing the natural and economic riches of the Murray-Darling Basin's wetlands
-

* * * * * * *

NEWS AND VIEWS is the North Central Victoria's Farming newsletter produced by the Department of Primary Industry Bendigo in association with NCCMA. Articles include:

Protecting and enhancing the Campaspe River

Waging war on weeds

Native grasslands in central Victoria

Found: platypus in the Serpentine Creek

* * * * * * *

Also received recently:

Castlemaine Naturalist(CFNC)

Ballarat Naturalist(BFNC)

Geelong Naturalist(GFNC)

Sun-Nat(Sunraysia FNC)

Land for Wildlife News

Field Nats News(FNCV)

Newsletter(Echuca & District Bird Observers)

The Living Murray(Murray-Darling Basin Commission): the interim report of the scientific reference panel for the Living Murray initiative; also includes leaflets on many related topics.

* * * * * * *

Photographic Competition – Snapshot of a Region ....continued form page 4

This photographic competition aims to celebrate the region's natural assets as identified in the North Central Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) - a blueprint for natural resource management through to 2007. The North Central RCS is implemented by the North Central Catchment Management Authority, its partners and the regional community with State and federal funds, including the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

Conditions of Entry:

- Photos should be taken within the North Central Catchment Management Authority region
- photos can be either hard copy (minimum A5 size, maximum A4) or digital image (minimum 300dpi, maximum size 4MB)
- Photos will be kept by the NCCMA
- Each photo should be accompanied by a caption, name and address.
- Permission should be obtained from any people in the photo for the NCCMA to reproduce the image
- By entering the competition, entrants will assign a limited copyright of the image to the NCCMA enabling reproduction in NCCMA communication material. Photographer will be credited whenever the images are used.
- Entrants may submit a maximum of five photos and are only eligible to win one individual prize.
- Winning entrants in the under-18 category are also eligible to win a camera fo their school.
- Entrants under 18 years of age must have adult consent.

Photos can be entered in amateur and under 18 categories.
They can be historical or recent photos, black and white or colour, digital or hard copy - but they must be from within this region.
Winning entries will be announced on World Environment Day, 5 June 2004, at the Environment Festival in Swan Hill.

Cash Prizes of up to $200 will be offered for the three best entries in each category and photos will be used in environmental displays and publications. A camera prize will be provided to the school of the best student photo.

Entries close 5pm, Friday 28 May
For further information visit www.nccma.vic.gov.au or call 54487124.

(please contact Sabine Wilkens for a copy of the entry form)

Significant Bird Event

by Jim Downey, CEO Birds Australia

Arguably one of the most extraordinary events associated with migratory waders in Australia in recent years is occurring right now in North Western Australia. On the 7 & 8 February 2004, members of Birds Australia (BA) and our special interest group, the Australasian Wader Studies Group lead by Dr Clive Minton (BA Fellow) counted between 2.4 and 2.8 MILLION Oriental Praticoles at 80 mile beach (Anna Plains Station). The previous estimate of the total Australian population of this bird was 60 000!!!

An extract of Clive's e-mail of Monday 9 February advising us of this remarkable event is reproduced here:

When we arrived here on February 2nd, it was immediately apparent that an unusual situation existed. For the last 100km of the journey the bush on either side of the main highway was alive with feeding Oriental Praticoles. In the late afternoon, vast clouds (smokes) of birds could be seen swirling around over many parts of the plains and these gradually descended towards dusk to roost for the night in quite dense patches all over the agricultural grasslands of the plain. Next day, their daily pattern became apparent. From dawn, birds fed extensively all over the grassland of the station and further inland amongst the bush at least as far back as the great Northern Highway.
As the day heated up (the weather was relatively settled and calm and sunny throughout) the birds gradually moved down to the coast where they collected in huge aggregations on the upper mud flats and, as the tide rose, on the sandy beaches.

We have obviously been speculating as to why such a huge number of birds is present here now but has never previously been recorded. The previous most similar situation was in January 2000, when a minimum of 50 000 Oriental Praticoles were observed on Anna Plains Station. However, in that year, there was extensive water on the agricultural pastureland and birds were therefore not needing to adjourn to the beach during the heat of the day. No extensive surveys or wider population estimates were attempted or possible at that time. It would appear that in 2004 conditions have been absolutely perfect to attract the maximum number of Oriental Praticoles to feed in the area of farmland

adjacent to 80 mile beach and that the weather and habitat conditions have been the optimum to force them to use the beach during the day where they could be observed and counted.
Nevertheless it is till quite a staggering increase Of previous estimates of the population of this species and one which would be difficult to believe by anyone who had not seen this phenomenal sight of beaches densely covered with Praticoles a kilometre or so wide for stretches tens of kilometres long.

'Growing Native Grasses' ..... continued from page 7

The presenters

Ian Cole has been involved in native grass research for more than a decade and has a thorough understanding of the capacities of each of the grasses on display, especially for revegetation programs.

Wayne Brown is actively involved in the Native Grass Resources Group in South Australia which provides technical information on Australian native grasses. Wayne will report on the use of native grasses by several vineyards to lower water tables and reduce salinity.

Meredith Mitchell is the author of work on the identification of native grasses in field conditions. She will talk about the ways native grasses can be used for grazing and their value as fodder.

Ian Chivers has worked with native grasses for over 18 years and has developed three varieties of native grasses specifically for turf applications. He is responsible for starting the Native Seeds business.

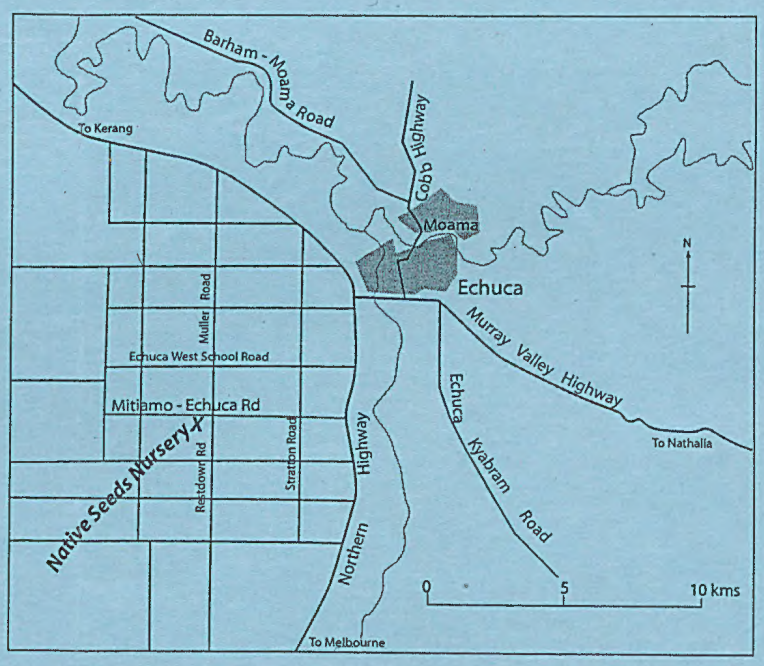
Tim Barden is the owner and manager of Kowarra Transplants which hosts the Native Seeds nursery. He has been actively involved in growing the nursery plots.

Getting there

Native Seeds nursery is on the property of Kowarra Transplants, a short drive from Echuca. The nursery is approximately 400 metres west of the intersection of the Echuca-Mitiamo Road and Restdown Road.

Please park inside the property as traffic can be dangerous on the main road.

Remember to register your interest in attending by 19 March 2004. Email address for replies is enquiries@nativeseeds.com.au



About Native Seeds Pty Ltd

Native Seeds Pty Ltd is a privately owned company which specialises in the production and sale of seed of selected species of grasses native to Australia. It has been in operation since 1988 and is the only Australian company currently able to grow and harvest seed from selected native grasses on a commercial scale. Extensive research was undertaken into the most appropriate species of grass suitable for commercial seed production. Native Seeds now knows how to grow native grasses on a broad scale. As field trials were undertaken, research into effective harvesting methods and seed cleaning techniques also took place.

Native Seeds is expanding its operations to provide seed for mining revegetation, rehabilitation of disturbed sites; eg roadsides, water catchments, for environmental restoration and landcare as well as for agricultural, turf and landscaping applications. Seed is available for sale from our secure e-commerce web site at <www.nativeseeds.com.au>.

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, March 10 7.30pm
Carol Hall: 'Natural History of Antarctica & Patagonia' (see page 3 for details)

Wednesday, April 14 7.30pm
Jim Radford: 'Essential habitat for bird populations'

Wednesday, May 12 7.30pm
Ern Perkins: 'Eucalypt hunting in Western Australia'

Wednesday, June 9 7.30pm
Melody Serena: 'Ecology and Conservation of the Platypus in Victoria'

Wednesday, July 14 7.30pm
Rod Absom & Ruth Lawrence: 'The Slaty Creek Project (Calder Hwy)'

Bird Observers Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm. Please confirm with Kerrie Norris (ph 54478017)

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Wednesday, March 24 7.30pm
Topic - Frog pond development.
All welcome to participate.

The next two **working bees** for the **BFNC garden** are

Saturday 6th March &
Saturday 10th April
9am
All welcome

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Weed Spotters Wanted!

To tackle potential, new and emerging weeds more effectively, the Department of Primary Industry (DPI) is developing a Weed Alert Rapid Response Plan for the State. One of its initiatives is to develop a network of weed spotters to report new weeds.

Weeds might be found in paddocks, on roadsides, in National Parks, at nurseries or the local fete or market.

To become a volunteer Weed Spotter in Victoria, send your contact details to Kate Blood at DPI, PO Box 7, Beaufort 3373 or email: Kate.Blood@dpi.vic.gov.au

---

Biodiversity Alliance

The Biodiversity Alliance now has a spot on the internet. It is currently being hosted by the Victorian National Parks association at www.vnpa.org.au/whatsnew/biodiversityalliance.htm

For those interested in joining the e-mail liste-server for the Biodiversity Alliance, details are included on the website.